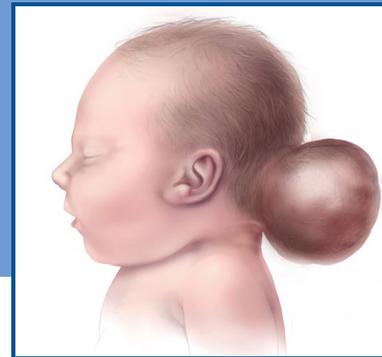


# Birth Defect Series: Encephalocele



**What:** Very early during pregnancy your baby's brain, skull, and spine begin to develop. An encephalocele occurs when the baby's skull does not come together completely over the brain. This causes parts of the brain to bulge through the skull.

**Why:** Encephaloceles are known as neural tube defects. The neural tube is the early form of what will become your baby's brain and spinal cord. Neural tube defects occur during the first month of pregnancy. Specific causes of most encephaloceles are not known at this time. Some neural tube defects may be caused by a lack of folic acid. Folic acid is an important vitamin needed in the development of the neural tube. Doctors recommend that women who can get pregnant get 400mcg (micrograms) of folic acid daily.

**When:** Encephaloceles are usually detected during pregnancy with the help of an ultrasound machine. However, small encephaloceles may be detected after birth only.

**How:** Surgery is typically needed to repair encephaloceles. During surgery parts of the brain that are not functioning are removed, bulging brain parts are placed within the skull, and any facial defects may be repaired. Babies with small encephaloceles may recover completely. Those with large amounts of brain tissue within the encephalocele may need other therapies following surgery.

## Resources for Illinois Families

### Adverse Pregnancy Outcomes Reporting System

[http://www.dph.illinois.gov/  
data-statistics/epidemiology/  
apors](http://www.dph.illinois.gov/data-statistics/epidemiology/apors)

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/  
birthdefects/  
encephalocele.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/birthdefects/encephalocele.html)

### March of Dimes

[http://  
www.marchofdimes.org/  
baby/neural-tube-  
defects.aspx](http://www.marchofdimes.org/baby/neural-tube-defects.aspx)

**And visit your  
doctor for more  
information.**

Image courtesy of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities.

